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Written statement* submitted by the Arab NGO Network for Development, a non-governmental organization on the roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[15 February 2016]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Economic and social rights conditions in Lebanon in light of second cycle Universal Periodic Review

During the three and a half an hour interactive dialogue session on November 2nd several countries that took the floor put a clear emphasis on the impacts of the Syrian crisis, acknowledged the pressure Lebanon face, appreciated the National Human Rights Action Plan and achievements on women's and disability rights in the country.

Nevertheless, although in comparison to the first cycle, while the Syria crisis altered the context totally and is well acknowledged by all, 219 recommendations received and pending a reply by Lebanon remained similar to first cycle, calling for steps towards the ratification of international human rights instruments, establishment of the National Human Rights Institution, migrant workers' rights, Palestinian refugee rights. Furthermore, like the first cycle review, there has not been a comprehensive review of the economic and social rights. The recommendations remained too general and vague calling Lebanon to take ''additional efforts'', '' further steps'' mainly, not stressing the very problematic in the country, namely the failure of economic and social policies adopted by successive governments in addressing national developmental challenges.

The Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND) takes this written statement as an opportunity to shed light on the condition of the economic and social rights in the country and urge Human Rights Council members to call Lebanon to take immediate and remedial action in addressing them through the implementation of UPR recommendations.

Moreover, most lately on February 4th, 2016 the international community convened in London in a conference entitled Supporting Syria and the region[1], during which Lebanon presented a paper related to the latest developments and the implications of the Syrian Crisis. ANND highlights that Government plans should be consistent and coherent with UPR recommendations received calling for action for addressing the refugee crisis. In fact, Lebanon should adopt a multi-annual rights-based and comprehensive national plan, centralizing the needs of both the refugees and the host communities. In turn, the donor community should unconditionally pledge to provide the requested $4.9 billion as financial support. This is key to address the violations they have been facing in full enjoyment of their rights.

In this context and related to the UPR recommendations received by Lebanon:

- While addressing inequality and poverty in the country remains a core challenge, second cycle recommendations remained focused on combatting poverty through implementation of support programs only. Indeed, the strategic response of Lebanon addressing this challenge is through the National Poverty Targeting Program which was restructured after the huge influx of Syrian refugees and named as Emergency National Poverty Targeting Project, with an increased budget. Yet the increasing inequality and economic and social gaps as well as the intergenerational transfer of poverty cannot be addressed by targeting only specific segments of the society and improving the income of the poorest families. Poverty can best be addressed by ensuring the universal and full enjoyment of the economic and social rights including clean water, adequate waste management strategy, energy, public transportation and housing as well as health and education including free schooling, and the accessibility and availability of these rights to all without any discrimination. Addressing poverty in Lebanon requires as well adoption of a fair taxation policy.
- Labor rights recommendations focused on the employment of Palestinian refugees, migrant domestic workers and fighting child labor, while on these issues Lebanon accepted several recommendations in the first cycle review in 2010 but still fails to ensure full and genuine implementation. On the other hand, the session did not focus on strengthening the rights of workers, especially with regard to the right to organize and the formation of independent trade unions and on reforming the social security system; expanding its scope and comprehensiveness. In addition, the review session was a missed opportunity to address a core problem, namely the lack of a comprehensive employment policy in Lebanon and in relation the need to enhance

[1] https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/498026/Supporting_Syria__the_Region_London_2016_-_Lebanon_Statement.pdf

productive sectors able to generate employment. It should be noted that according to the International Labor Organization, as a result of the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon, by 2015 an estimated 170,000 Lebanese had fallen into poverty, with unemployment doubling to about 20 percent[2]. The Lebanese government plans as announced in London Conference, towards job creation through Subsidized Temporary Employment Programme (STEP) and the SME sectors' development support should be part of a comprehensive and sustainable development approach and should assure to enhance productive sectors that refugees can contribute to. The planned investments in this context, particularly those prioritizing 'strategically selected sectors' namely from transport, energy, water, environment and public services should not merely seek supporting urgent national-level infrastructure needs of Lebanon but should be planned with a rights-based approach ensuring sustainable and decent work conditions for refugees.

- With regard to the right to health, high cost of health services were tackled in one recommendation, yet concrete steps are needed to reform the health system in Lebanon. This should aim at strengthening the regulatory role of the state in the health sector, defining the role of the different public and private stakeholders, monitoring their performance thus rooting out corruption and waste and establishing a health policy that prioritizes protection of the citizen in need of health services.
- With regard to the right to education, the call for equitable and sustainable resources should be noted by Lebanon as reflecting the problematic public spending on education and the related disparities in the quality of the public system and private education and inequalities in the enjoyment of the right to education. The role of the State as the main duty-holder for realization of the right to education should be recognized and measures to enhance the quality of public education must be implemented including developing a new unified curriculum, establishing and implementing quality-oriented strategies especially for public schools in rural areas and adapting the school environment to the basic needs of children and people with disabilities. Furthermore, financing call directed to international community during London Conference in terms of education sector, namely $350m a year ($1.75bn over five years) should prioritize the educational needs of Syrian children, aiming at ensuring availability, accessibility, affordability and adaptability of the right to education for them.

As accepted recommendations from the 219 pending-reply will remain as voluntary commitments undertaken in front of the international community, Lebanon needs to translate them into comprehensive, concrete and effective action at national level to advance the human rights conditions. This requires sincere implementation by adopting a road map and defining a clear timeline. Lebanon should establish a follow-up and monitoring mechanism that includes all relevant stakeholders including civil society and engage media to raise further awareness and to ensure accountability.

Furthermore, in order to ensure allocation of maximum available resources for the protection and promotion of human rights and to be able to properly manage the financial aid requested from the international community in addressing the refugee crisis, Lebanon should adopt the public budget law in the Parliament[3]. The planning of the budget should take into consideration above mentioned national strategies.

Moreover, the national plan adopted in addressing the refugee crisis should take into consideration the role of the local host communities and consequently the local authorities should be key actors in the implementation of this plan. This requires conducting the municipal elections planned for May 2016.

Last but not least, the commitment of international community in addressing the rights of refugees in Syria through directing related recommendations to Lebanon during its UPR review is welcome yet this should be supported by abiding to the development effectiveness principles in allocations of aid, including respecting national ownership, enhanced transparency and mutual accountability.

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[2] http://www.ilo.org/beirut/areasofwork/syrian-refugee-crisis/lebanon/lang--en/index.htm

[3] Lebanon is without an approved budget since 2005.